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TAGS: PGOV PINS IZ

SUBJECT: DISPUTED AREAS: KURDS AND ARABS MEET, AGREE ON MAKHMOUR, DESPITE INCREASE IN TENSIONS

SECRET//NOFORN

REF: A. BAGHDAD 1702
1B. BAGHDAD 1683
1C. BAGHDAD 1595
1D. BAGHDAD 1531

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor John Fox for reason 1.4(d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The UNAMI Arab Kurd High-Level Task Force (HLTF) met on Monday, June 29, and held productive discussions on the disputed Makhmour district. Despite UNAMI's concerns that the recently passed Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Constitution draft might undermine the talks, both the Kurdish and Iraqi negotiators declared they were committed to the HLTF negotiations. Talks also went on despite a recent incident in Makhmour. On June 28, Iraqi Army (IA) forces tried to pass through the district, apparently on their way to a new assignment in Mosul. Local Kurdish residents protested and blocked the road. Coalition Forces (CF) worked with both sides to reroute the IA unit's path to Mosul without going through Makhmour. END SUMMARY.

GOI AND KRG SAY HLTF STILL VIABLE

12. (C) The UNAMI Arab Kurd High-Level Task Force (HLTF) held its third session on Monday, June 29. Safa Al Din Al Safi and Farouk Abdallah attended for the Government of Iraq (GOI). Mohammed Ihsan and Khalid Schwani attended for the KRG. Andrew Gilmour, UNAMI's Acting Special Representative of the Secretary General (A/SRSG) opened Monday's meeting by asking both the GOI and KRG sides to comment on the continued relevance of the HLTF process. Gilmour asked specifically whether the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament's (IKP) passing of the KRG Constitution, which claims that many of the DIBs territories are a part of "Iraq Kurdistan" (Article 2), now made any negotiations on the DIBs moot (Ref A). Both sides responded that the KRG Constitution did not preclude the HLTF negotiations and both sides said they were committed to the process as led by UNAMI.

AGREEMENT MAKHMOUR SHOULD BE PART OF ERBIL/KRG

13. (C) The discussion moved directly to negotiations on the status of Makhmour district, which has historically been part of Erbil province (and thus potentially part of the KRG), but which has been administered by Ninewa province since the 1990s when the "Green Line" was established. Both sides quickly agreed in principle that Makhmour should be returned to Erbil's administration and be a part of the KRG. While the Kurds wanted to finish with Makhmour quickly and move on to other disputed districts, Al Safi (GOI) wanted to carefully examine how the district would be administered. He had particular concerns about how Gwyer and Qaraj, areas in Makhmour with large concentrations of Arabs and Turkmen, would be treated by the KRG. The next HLTF meeting will continue negotiations on Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs)

for Makhmour (with specific focus on Gwyer and Qaraj). The next HLTF meeting is currently scheduled for Monday, July 6.

ATTEMPTED IA MOVEMENT THROUGH MAKHMOUR

¶4. (S) Coincidentally, Makhmour district had just been the site of a potentially dangerous incident. On June 27, the evening before the HLTF met, the IA's 26 Brigade/7th Division forces attempted to enter Makhmour. The brigade was moving from Diyala, through Kirkuk, on its way to Mosul. Local residents protested the IA's movement into Makhmour and refused to let it pass; Peshmerga units positioned themselves further down the road to prevent the IA brigade from proceeding through Makhmour. Nearby CF were alerted, and resolved the dispute by convincing the IA to take another route to the south that does not pass through Makhmour. Neither side brought up this incident during the HLTF talks on Monday.

COMMENT

¶5. (C) It is reassuring that both the GOI and KRG confirmed to UNAMI, and to each other, that the HLTF is still a useful forum, at least for now. It is also reassuring that neither side apparently believes that the provisions in the KRG Constitution that appear to conflict with the GOI Constitution preclude negotiations on DIBs. (NOTE: Mohammed Ihsan claimed that he had not yet read the KRG Constitution. END NOTE).

¶6. (S) Discussions with CF and intelligence sources give no indication that the IA's attempt to travel through Makhmour was connected with, or intended to affect, the HLTF negotiations. The IA brigade claimed to have no knowledge of Arab-Kurd tensions in Makhmour, or that there were Peshmerga forces in the vicinity. Geographically, Makhmour is on a direct line between Kirkuk and Mosul, so the IA's move might not have been intended to provoke. However, local Peshmerga forces believe the IA deliberately attempted to cross the district in order to irritate Kurdish sensibilities. A Peshmerga officer claimed that, since the Mosul Dam incident in late May, the IA has been supposed to coordinate all military movements in DIBs areas. END COMMENT.

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